

## TIPS FOR WORKERS WORKING WITH DADS: IS THERE ROOM FOR FATHERS?

There is a tendency to work less with fathers than with mothers, but we can change this. Here are some things you can do:

- ◆ Make finding and reaching out to fathers a part of your routine in *every* case.
- ◆ Keep an open mind if you hear negative things about a man before you meet him. Someone may have had a bad experience with him in the past, but he may have changed. Also, be sure you have room to listen to his side.
- ◆ Give him room to express anger. There is a difference between showing anger and threatening behaviors.
- ◆ If a father is threatening in some way, connect with him by setting limits respectfully and reminding him that you want to work with him in a good way. See if he can respond in a good way by backing off. (If he makes threats to harm you or someone else, that's different. Get help.)

Here are some tips for building strength-based relationships with fathers:

- ⇒ Approach dads in a strength based way by reminding them of how important they are to their children, and how there are some things that only they can do for their kids. "Your kids will carry what you do forever." If he has been harmful or negligent, "you can change things for them by changing your behavior."
- ⇒ Ask a man how he wants his children to remember him 10-15 years from now. Even men who have been toxic to their families have positive visions about what they would like to mean to their kids. It's a good "doorway" for non-defensive self-reflection. You can ask: "How would you like your kids to remember you?" If he describes a positive vision of how he would like his kids to remember him, you can ask: "What can you do to make that happen?" and "How can I help you with that?"
- ⇒ Remind fathers that they are role models to their kids. Boys learn about manhood from their fathers, and girls get a sense of what to expect from men from them. You can use the **"BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL"** Tip Sheet.
- ⇒ If a father does not live at home with his family and the children's mother is mad at him, use the **"CO-PARENTING WORK"** Tip Sheet, to talk with both parties. If there has been domestic violence, seek consultation to make sure you go ahead safely.
- ⇒ If he is out of the home, but engaged with the kids, it's important for him to be consistent, and to do his best to maintain a cordial and respectful relationship with the kids' mom. The Tip Sheet called **ADVICE TO FATHERS WHO ARE OUT OF THE HOME** may be useful.
- ⇒ If they are uncertain about discipline or appear to be rough or abrupt, the Tip Sheet called **DISCIPLINING CHILDREN** may be useful. It emphasizes the need for self-control, consistency, clear rules, and collaboration with the primary caretaker (the last part is critical).
- ⇒ Talk about the importance of gentle, child-centered play. Even though many men did not have fathers who played with them, it's something that many men want to learn and that can increase their sense of confidence and competence as dads. You can use the **PLAYING WITH CHILDREN** Tip Sheet.
- ⇒ If there are questions about domestic violence, you can use the Tip Sheet called **HELPFUL THINGS TO SAY TO MEN WHO HAVE BEEN VIOLENT WITH THEIR PARTNERS**. If there appears to be high risk violence, you can speak to your supervisor and seek consultation with Specialists from the DV Unit.